

Violence Unlikely in Lithuania

Kremlin, Baltic Leaders Engage in War of Words Over Secession

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 20—Despite high anxiety abroad, neither Lithuanians nor Kremlin leaders expect their dispute to end in violence. Instead, the conflict has become a combination of propaganda, confusion and negotiation.

Lithuania's declaration of independence this month has posed a serious threat to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's attempt to hold the Soviet Union together. But Gorbachev also appears aware that even a limited use of force would jeopardize his credibility abroad and the future of his *perestroika* reform program.

"Among ordinary people, of course, there are some fears, but the politicians on all sides believe the use of tanks is practically impossible," said Justas Paleskis, the Lithuanian Communist Party's ideology chief. "The invasions of Czechoslovakia [in 1968] and Hungary [in 1956] are realities, but in those days you were dealing with Brezhnev and Khrushchev, not Mikhail Gorbachev."

Lithuania's new president, Vytautas Landsbergis, told reporters tonight in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, that he viewed Gorbachev's demand—that factories remain Soviet property until further notice—not so much as a threat as a negotiating point.

Landsbergis expressed little concern about a possible invasion or more subtle military pressure. "No country would welcome such an action by a foreign army on its ter-

ritory," he said. Despite reports of unusual Soviet troop movements and military flights, Landsbergis said, the only extraordinary security measure he has noticed was the posting of extra guards at nuclear reactors in the republic.

From the start of the Lithuanian independence movement two years ago, Landsbergis and his colleagues have adopted a style of implacable determination. Leaders of the Sajudis independence movement said they anticipated months ago that Gorbachev would react to an independence declaration as he has—by calling it illegal.

The Supreme Soviet, the nation's standing legislature, has drafted a law on secession under which a republic would be required to hold a referendum on its plan and then wait for a five-year transition period. Finally, a secession proposal would have to gain approval by the national legislature.

Gorbachev also faces independence campaigns in the Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia. According to the Estonian newspaper *Paevaleht*, Gorbachev said during a four-hour meeting Monday with an Estonian delegation that "the road chosen by Lithuania leads to a dead end."

Gorbachev "pointed out that in the event of a divorce, it is not important whether the marriage was contracted legally or not," the newspaper said. "The property must be divided." He reportedly delivered a similar message to Latvian leaders today.

Pro-independence politicians in Estonia and Latvia dominated recent elections in both republics,

heightening concern among Kremlin officials.

The Kremlin has on its side important instruments of popular persuasion, including the evening news program *Vremya*, which reaches a daily audience of about 150 million people. Tonight *Vremya*, echoing articles in the newspapers *Red Star* and *Worker Tribune*, gave the impression that the Lithuanian Sajudis movement was recruiting a paramilitary force.

Sajudis officials said, however, that they have signed up about 250 men to staff customs stations on the Latvian and Polish borders, mainly to check that no valuable resources are taken out of Lithuania. Sajudis said that no such posts would be established along borders with the Soviet republics of Russia and Byelorussia and added that the patrols would not be armed.

"It will be a very gentle regime," said Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene.

Immediately after *Vremya*, central television broadcast at length a videotape of an anti-secession rally in Vilnius Sunday. Central television has never carried such extensive coverage of pro-independence rallies in the republic, which have been far more frequent.

In newspapers and on central television, Landsbergis was depicted as high-handed and as ignoring the views of ethnic Russians and Poles living in Lithuania. More than 75 percent of the republic's population is of Lithuanian descent.

Landsbergis said he would wait for the initial wave of anger in Moscow to pass and then begin real talks. "It takes two to negotiate," he said.